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"SEPTEMBER MORN" By Paul Chabas

## Public Censorship of Art

By JAMES WILLIAM PATTISON

ALL censors are obnoxious, as hated as the public headmen. In England there is a censor of plays. He would not make the playwrights sore, but for his arbitrary and narrow point of view. Whatever else he is an educated man. In America we have men on the police force who have the oversight of pictures and are given absolute authority to act in any way their judgment dictates; that is, if they have any judgment at all. It is difficult to believe that the officer who descended upon poor little "A September Morning," and ordered her taken out of the photographer's window, for retirement to obscurity, acted thus purely from sense of duty. To be sure, we hear of policemen

seeking notoriety, but, of course, nothing of this sort could possibly influence a Chicago policeman, whatever might happen in some other, more benighted city.

What then, is the picture, "A September Morning?" As we know it, it is a photographic reproduction of Paul Chabas' painting from the last Paris Salon. We see a charming young girl, still in her teens, who has ventured into the lake for an early dip. Not having quite considered the morning chill of the season, she stands in shallow water and tries to protect herself from the air by folding hands and arms about her body. The attitude she takes almost precludes the possibility of calling the figure "nude," because so much cov-

ered and concealed. So coy and modest, so absolutely pure, so devoid of coquetry; why find fault with that which is so faultless? Scarcely more than a child why accuse her of evil intentions? There is hardly a boy in the country who might not easily see his sister in a similar state, nor think evil of it.

His Honor, the Mayor, rules, that his support of the policeman's action was not because the picture is a nude, that he had no objections to its sale, but he did not think it should be displayed in a store window for children to see. While we comprehend His Honor's point of view, it may be that he is mistaken. All boys are alert to make merry over an unusual situation, and the assembled youngsters doubtless had their jokes. There certainly is nothing about the figure to excite merriment or any other feeling, so absolutely unconscious is the little lady. In a lifelong experience with boys and girls in the presence of nude figures, I have never known any harm coming to them because of familiarity with clean pictures, nude or other. A host of boys and girls, many of them young, have grown up in life classes, and gone out into the wide world. Many of them I knew well. Have these proved themselves to be good citizens? They are the salt of the earth and are doing magnificent educational work. I believe that boys and girls "find themselves" much more quickly when made familiar with the nude in art, and my own girls are destined to pass through this experience.

The noteworthy fact is that this little September Morn girl is so unconscious; not a suggestive movement about her. If the censors wish to arrest men who show designedly suggestive pictures, secretly, in a backroom, good can be done. The secret showing of these things is, in itself, a vulgarity, rotten and harmful. But this gem of art; who wants to banish this to the background? To this painting was given, this year, the great Medal of Honor, the highest rank in the gift of the Paris Salon.

For years Chabas has climbed up step by step and now has reached the top. Only one higher rank can come to him and that is not a Salon Honor, but a National position, gained through the votes of the exclusive members of the Institute of France. It is a reproduction of this honored picture which a policeman persecutes. Some one may say, "But it is probable that our police censor knew nothing about Chabas or his standing in the world." Oh, shame! He should know. What business has this good, but misguided man, to flash his star over a fine picture of which he knows nothing at all? Censorship of such works should be handled carefully and prayerfully, and only by those who know. Are Chicagoans to be disgraced, in the eyes of the world, by such an *ignominium*? And, how far is he going with his meddling? If such an one carries out this project once, what may he not do on a second provocation? Nude or draped, the evil in any picture lies in the intention to make it evil and to awaken lewd thoughts. This may be on the part of the artist or some person who may have the handling of the picture.

The nudity of itself is not suggestive. A wicked suggestion may be designedly attached to a picture by any vulgar person. But our little girl furnishes no such suggestion. She is as unconscious as a bathing bird which seeks refreshment in the rain water left by a passing shower.

One question is uppermost in our minds; are the various men who move against the picture embarrassed by any rumors of their own misdeeds? Are they entirely pure? Are they doing this work because their office demands this line of activity, or because they feel in their hearts the necessity for it? Far be it from me to make accusation; but there are disturbing rumors afloat. Are we to trust art censorship to any but the most unsullied souls? Probably it were well not to dig too deep, seeking the mire; but this performance already stinks.

# PAINTINGS BY JOHN W. ALEXANDER AND THE SCANDINAVIAN ARTISTS

THE regulars and rebels are again at war and a century of art history is recalled by the exhibition, side by side, of Alexander's works and those of the painters of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. In this case Alexander is the regular. Few of the Scandinavians are other than rebels. But rebels may be admirable characters, and they become patriots the moment they make a success. This war has been going on for long years commencing, in the present era, with the rebellion, in France, of Delacroix against the painters David, of the Empire, and his pupil, Ingres, both art dictators and unrelenting tyrants in their control of the academy. Both of these were supporters of classic art. So from David's time there descended a long line of art which exists even to this day, and this is regular art. From the rebel Delacroix has come down to us a line of admirable rebels producing a very vital art, and the Scandinavians are of them. The regulars paint beautifully, with high finish; draw wonderfully well; color tenderly and appeal to the major part of humanity. The work of the rebels is not at all pretty, not finished, not well-drawn and generally, not tenderly colored. The regular art may be loved at first glance. People have to learn to love the work of the rebels. The regulars wear nice official uniforms; the rebels are liable to be tattered and demalions.

Alexander's work is always polished, of a texture to accompany satin gowns and costly furniture. His art language recalls the poetry of Longfellow, not of Shakespeare. However, as we love both of these poets, so we are moved by each sort of art language. Alexander shows us a young woman dressed in pale tones of strange greenish-yellow, an original color. She sits in a chair and leans over a table with greenish cover, holding in her hands a bowl of flowers with another yellowish

green tint, and green appears in the hat and the sash curtains. All these objects are painted with bold sweeps of the brush, everything frank and free, though the paint has probably been rubbed down to eradicate the roughness of the brush. Entering by a nearby window, the light pours in volumes enveloping the figure in luminosity. Perhaps the smoothness of the flesh painting creates a certain hardness making it less acceptable than the drapery painting. Naturally, everyone exclaims, "This is beautiful work." It is useless to imagine that this large canvas would be improved by a little roughness. Each artist is as he is, and roughness is not a virtue with the regulars.

Violently contrasting with Alexander's manner is the work of the Norwegian painter, Hendrick L. Lund. This artist's two figures on one canvas, "Andreas and Margit," are life-sized, the tall man standing beside a seated woman. What are these two doing? Nothing but give the painter an opportunity to render character, the portrait painter's highest ambition. It is in this particular line that Alexander is weakest. The man's great mop of unkempt gray hair and beard, the angular features, the shapeless vest and trousers, ill-formed shirt leaves none too neat, the ill-formed hand, are all dashed in almost violently, and the background, meaning nothing, keeps up the style. The old lady's careworn face is in keeping with the other. Is it a pleasing picture? Not at all. Has it a right to be called art? Certainly it has. So much nerve, so much veracity, so much abandon in brushing and so clear a presentation of character must commend themselves, and the swiftness of execution gives the crispness of first painting without tameness or weakness.

To illustrate the tendencies of the two schools we turn back to another Alexander picture; to girls size of life standing by a window in graceful poses and looking down at a white kitten playing on the floor. One

of these is in a very tender color of red, the other in a quiet green dress, while the breeze coming in at the open window lifts the soft sash curtain. A series of refined colors does duty all about the canvas, making beauty in every part. In one of the Norwegian pictures these various colors would probably be violent and somewhat irritating, but, of course, all rebels are irritating. Of course, every one admires such delicate art, though he may become enthusiastic over the ruder effort.

"Dangerous Waters," by the Norwegian painter, Christian Krohg, though by no means colorful or smoothly handled, has been greatly admired because of a pathetic story emphatically told. The figure is life-sized and nearly fills the canvas. An old sea captain pores over a chart unrolled on his knees, trying to lay out his course through the complications of a rugged coast and the darkness of night. Just beside his head are round portholes suggesting the interior of his little cabin. With braced legs he balances himself while the vessel rolls and pitches. His wet, yellow oilskins suggest that it is but a moment since he descended from his water-washed deck. Bowed down over the chart, the sunburned face works dark, while the overhead light falls directly on a shining bald head. Perplexity and anxiety have brought out a number of rope-like wrinkles across his forehead. The sympathies of all the world go with him. He is a character, characterfully painted. There are absolutely no pretty colors and the handling is rude; but a face like that will never be forgotten.

One of the most noted of the Norwegian painters, Edvard Munch, has produced "The Sick Child," a young girl propped up in bed, her head on the white pillow, turns to her mother, who sits beside the bed with bowed head. This is a very powerful work as rudely painted as possible, but a manifestation of genius because so expressive. The girl's face suggests that she is at the point of death. Regardless of classical rules the eye, turned toward the mother,

is so rubbed together as to indicate the sightlessness of oblivion. There are many spots and lines of lively red in the picture, the sick child's bedraggled hair is red and a heavy line of the same is drawn around the black hair of the mother. Nobody could explain this use of red, except that with distance the color seems to fall in with the rest of the picture, there being much positive color all about. A green lap robe contrasts with this, as does a mass of green and blue handling in the background. Munch has always been the leading rebel, and were this a less convincing picture we might condemn the artist. But he evidently will live as he has lived, one of the great leaders of his party.

We can give only a few other incidents of this hard-to-understand painting. Among the Danes, Jens F. Willumsen exhibits "Youth and Sunshine," a flat sand beach and boys rushing gleefully towards the ocean. The movements of these naked youngsters could not possibly be better. Some critics accuse the artist of copying the figures of Sorolla, but these movements are distinctly original. It is quite impossible to describe the color here. The boys' backs are all more or less in shadow, their anatomy is well rendered, but in such ferocious spots that one has to walk back two rooms in order to make things look reasonable. The strange brush strokes are immensely effective and the whole picture carries us away with enthusiasm. Some other pictures by this artist are as furious in color as Alexander's pictures are sweet and tender.

Among the Swedish painters there is sufficient eccentricities of subject and manner, but they are far more civilized in painting than the other two nations. From the point of view of academical training Anders Zorn is a regular. In no place does he indulge himself with rude painting. While the laughing girl's face is original and an undoubted portrait, the handling is academical, though of a very high order.